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ABSTRACT

This leaflet contains guidelines for local teacher associations and negotiating teams in developing teacher-board agreements on evaluation procedures and career development programs for professional staffs in New Jersey public school districts. Included are discussion of the reasons for evaluation and the basic principles behind it, a list of what should be evaluated, suggestions as to how it should be done, listing of the teacher's rights with respect to evaluation, and specific recommendations to local teacher associations. Focus throughout the discussion is one of distinction between the two types of evaluation: 1) job-oriented evaluation designed to provide a basis for the granting of tenure, for the withholding or granting of an increment, or for the dismissal of incompetent or incapacitated practitioners; and 2) staff development, career-oriented evaluation intended to improve the effectiveness of the individual practitioner, to inspire professional growth, and to shape a successful teaching career. Suggestions are made with regard to teacher supervision and counseling procedures related to each type of evaluation. (JS)

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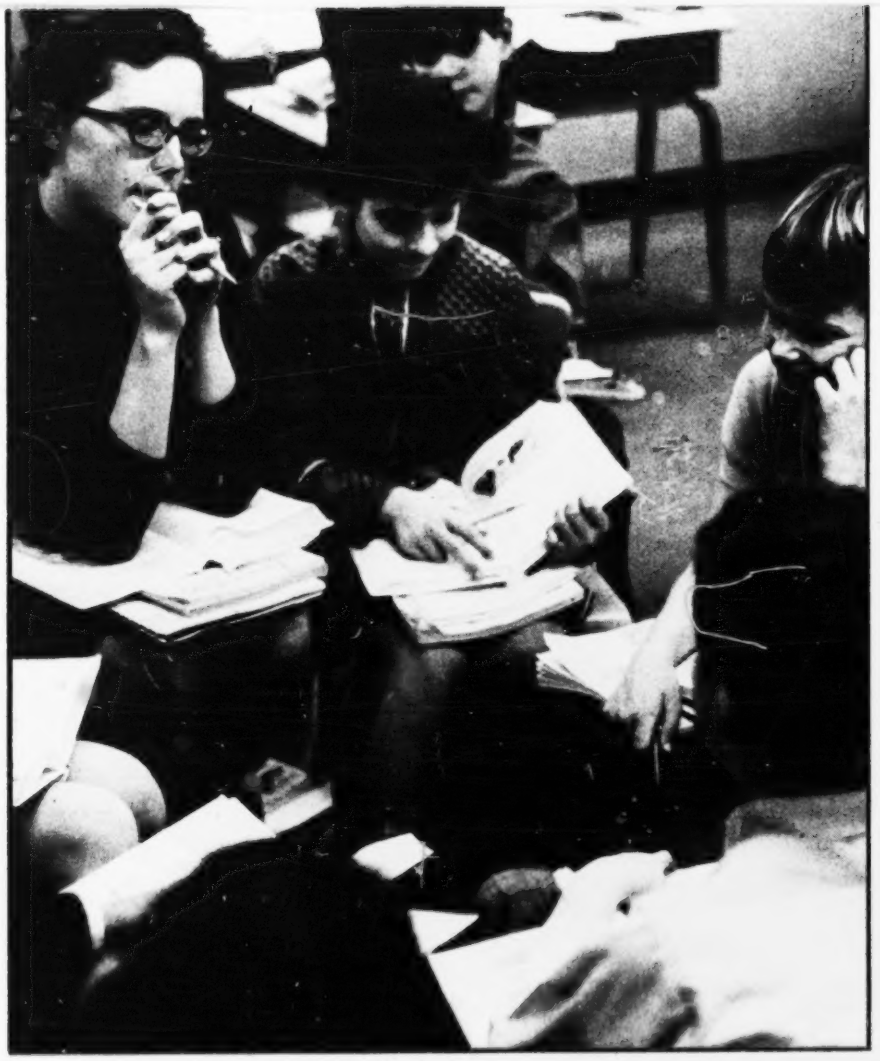

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NJEA

Speaks Out On . . .

Teacher Evaluation

SP004534

———guidelines for local teacher associations and negotiating teams in developing teacher-board agreements on evaluation procedures and career development programs for professional staffs in New Jersey public school districts.

Adopted by the NJEA Delegate Assembly, November 5, 1970.

The following policy statement and recommendations were adopted by the NJEA Delegate Assembly—the Association's representative policy-making body—on Nov. 5, 1970.

PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT is the concern of every member of the teaching profession. Boards of education, school administrators, individual teachers, and teacher associations all devote time and effort to the development of professional competence.

REASONS FOR EVALUATION

In many cases, professional improvement requires evaluation of teacher performance. Evaluation of educators has two purposes. It is a basis for rehiring and firing; this is job-oriented evaluation. It is also a basis for staff development; this is career-oriented evaluation.

Job-oriented evaluation. The traditional purpose of teacher evaluation has been to provide a basis for the granting of tenure, for the withholding or granting of an increment, or for the dismissal of incompetent or incapacitated practitioners. Proper job-oriented evaluation serves this purpose.

Under the Tenure Hearing Act and decisions by the state and federal courts, the school administration has the responsibility of guaranteeing that when a teacher is dismissed (or when his increment is withheld), he is treated fairly, for just cause, with full regard to his right of due process. Proper job-oriented evaluation serves this purpose, protecting the rights and responsibilities of all parties.

Staff Development. The more important (but less common) purpose of evaluation is to improve the effectiveness of the individual practitioner, to inspire professional growth, and to shape a successful teaching career. Career-oriented evaluation serves this purpose.

THE PROBLEM

Most current evaluation of teacher performance is job-oriented. Career-development has been sadly lacking.

Thus, at present, the teacher's desire for professional improvement is usually intertwined with—and frequently suppressed by—fears about job security. For the teacher, requesting help is looked upon as an admission of deficiency to a superior who makes decisions on hiring, firing, promoting, and demoting. For the evaluator, a request for assistance can appear to be a warning signal: "Here is a weak link that bears watching." By the very nature of the arrangement, the present state of job-oriented evaluation discourages voluntary teacher requests for classroom help. THIS IS THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT SHOULD BE.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

The sole defensible purpose of any school activity—including evaluation—is to upgrade the quality of education being offered to the pupils. The overriding purpose is improvement of performance. To achieve this end:

1. Evaluation should be constructive—to provide stimulation rather than defeatism.
2. The district's programs and procedures for evaluating members of the school staff should be mutually developed by and acceptable to the teacher association, the administration, and the board of education.
3. Evaluation of non-tenure teachers should differ from evaluation of teachers in general.
4. Every school district should use expert job-oriented evaluations in reaching decisions on such personnel matters as dismissal, retention, the granting of tenure, withholding of increment, promotions, and reassignment.
5. Because employees must have checks and balances against unfair or unfounded evaluations, these personnel decisions should be tied to the district's grievance procedures and should be grievable if individual teachers or the teacher association take exception.
6. Every district should have a comprehensive career-development program for improving the skills and performance of all members of the school staff.
7. Every district should have a suitable staff of helping teachers, evaluators, supervisors, principals, other administrators (plus outside consultants) to carry out its program of job-oriented and career-oriented evaluation.

EVALUATION AS IT NOW EXISTS

Most evaluations are job-oriented. The number of evaluations varies with the school district and with the status of the employee. Some districts make none. Some evaluate only non-tenured teachers. A few evaluate all employees, the number ranging to an extreme of perhaps six per year.

Evaluation requires information. Most evaluations are based on a "visitation" by a supervisor, who sits at a student desk and observes the teacher for a part of a period or part of the day. Some evaluations also use "instruments" such as rating scales or forms requiring narrative comment written by the supervisor during the observation.

Evaluation can be "formal" or "informal." Some are announced in advance; some are not. In the informal visitation, the evaluator observes for a short period without using any evaluation instrument or writing any report.

Formal visitations last longer. Generally, the evaluator uses an observation form and writes a report for the teacher's superiors, to be filed permanently in the teacher's personnel folder.

A variety of members of the school administration currently do the evaluating. In elementary schools, the evaluator is usually the principal or an assistant principal, although sometimes an administrator from outside the building—such as an assistant superintendent or a supervisor of elementary instruction—makes a visitation. In secondary schools, evaluation is less likely to be a responsibility of the principal's office and more likely to be a duty of the department chairman.

WHAT SHOULD BE EVALUATED?

Because teaching is a human enterprise, success depends—not on production—but on intercommunication among human beings. A teacher with a loud voice can succeed as well as one with a soft voice. The introvert can fare as well as the extrovert; the male as well as the female; the scholarly as well as the pragmatic. Evaluators should seek no one personality type.

The teacher's philosophy of life and education are important elements in his classroom performance. They are so important that they should be basic considerations in initial employment. By hiring a teacher, the school district's personnel officer infers that the candidate's philosophy suits the school system. Thus, supervisors evaluating a teacher's performance should generally avoid considerations about personal beliefs and concentrate on areas where improvement is possible and will benefit the pupils.

What, then, should be evaluated in the performance of the classroom teacher?

Effective teaching results from a combination of planned actions and reactions. It includes these elements:

1. Effective, democratic discipline.
2. The teacher's competence in his subject field.
3. The teacher's enthusiasm for the subject he teaches.
4. The teacher's concern for students.
5. The teacher's art and technique of presentation.
6. The teacher's preparation for a specific lesson.
7. The teacher's personal appearance.
8. The physical appearance of the classroom.
9. The teacher's willingness to accept new responsibilities and his performance of extra assignments.

These other considerations affect teaching effectiveness:

The classroom climate. Does learning occur efficiently in the classroom? Are student activities purposeful? Or are the students so uncontrolled that planned instruction cannot proceed? Are they so over-controlled that student creativity is curbed?

Interaction. Do students feel free to comment and ask questions? Does the teacher accept questions without appearing to snub or quash the students who ask them? Does the teacher deal honestly with student questions and needs? Do the students appear satisfied by the teacher's answers?

Objectivity. Does the teacher explore all sides of topics and questions? Does he admit that other opinions exist, and attitudes other than his own are possible? Or does he try to compel students to accept his attitudes and opinions?

Motivation. Does the teacher challenge students the most? Does he ask the most probing questions? Does he cause the most students to think, to probe, to question, to inquire, to examine, to use logic? These are all signs of an outstanding teacher.

Students. Do the teacher's students learn the skills they are expected to learn? Do they participate in the learning experiences that the teacher plans? Do they help to plan these learning experiences?

These are the areas that school administrators can—and should—evaluate.

WHO SHOULD BE EVALUATED?

If anyone on the school professional staff is evaluated, then **everyone** must be evaluated—including the evaluators and the chief school officers.

Each professional—administrator, specialist, teacher—will grow in competence and skill to the degree that he is cognizant of his educational strengths and weaknesses.

HOW SHOULD EVALUATION BE DONE?

Because evaluation is a difficult, delicate, and subjective business requiring a variety of insights and skills, it should be done in teams of experts rather than by an individual.

One important way that teachers improve their capability is by self-evaluation. The evaluation process in every school system should encourage teachers to give critical analysis to their own classroom work.

Another important—but often untapped—source of professional improvement is the teacher's staff of colleagues. Peers can be given responsibility in the career development of the school staff.

Student and parent interest, obviously, is a valuable resource in the constructive evaluation of any member of the school staff. Specific procedures—developed in the spirit of the relevant New Jersey statutes—can be worked out to offer students and parents continuing participation in the identification of criteria for the evaluation of professional performance.

THE TEACHER'S RIGHTS IN EVALUATION

Performance criteria and traits to be judged should be understood and agreed to by both teachers and administrators before the evaluation process begins. Mutually developed evaluation criteria should be discussed and disseminated.

The time, place, and conditions for the appraisal should be acceptable to both parties. This requires personal contact. To evaluate any particular lesson, the evaluator must first know (1) what the teacher's goals are and (2) how he or she expects to achieve these goals.

All evaluation of teachers should be done openly, with full knowledge of the teacher being evaluated. No eavesdropping, "bugging," or other hidden surveillance should be used.

The teacher is entitled to know that the evaluator, himself, has been an experienced and successful classroom teacher.

Evaluation must take note of special circumstances. The teacher of special education, for example, does not use the same teaching techniques as the teacher in the regular classroom.

A portion of the evaluations should be performed by someone specifically skilled in the teacher's professional or subject area. Even a department chairman may lack relevant background when, for example, the department is vocational education, the chairman's field is distributive education, and the teacher's specialty is auto mechanics.

Every visitation should be followed by a conference between teacher and evaluator, as soon as the supervisor can draw together his thoughts, observations, and suggestions.

The conference between teacher and evaluator should occur promptly. The teacher should be given a copy of the evaluation report a sufficient amount of time before the conference so that he can study it thoroughly.

No evaluation reports should be submitted to the central office or otherwise acted upon before the conference between teacher and evaluator.

The evaluation report should include an assessment of (1) the strengths of the teacher; (2) progress the teacher has made since the previous evaluation; (3) remaining difficulties; and (4) specific suggestions on measures the teacher can take to improve his performance in areas where difficulties have been indicated.

The school system should provide help in overcoming specified difficulties.

No teacher should be asked to sign a blank or incomplete evaluation form.

No material derogatory to a teacher's conduct, service, character, personality, or reputation should be placed in the teacher's personnel file—including an evaluation report—unless the teacher has first been shown the material and had an opportunity to review it.

To any material prepared for his personnel file, the teacher should have the right to submit a written answer which, after being reviewed by the superintendent or his designee, is attached to the file copy.

The teacher should have the right, upon request, to review the contents of his personnel file and to receive, at board expense, copies of any documents contained therein.

The teacher should have the right to indicate those documents in his personnel file which he believes are obsolete or otherwise inappropriate to retain. After a review by the superintendent or his designee, materials deemed obsolete should be destroyed. Disputes over the retention of such documents should be considered grievances, with action beginning at the superintendent's level.

Several evaluators—not just one—should observe the work of every educator before he is granted tenure. The granting or denial of tenure should not be the decision of just one person.

EVALUATION AND THE NON-TENURE TEACHER

Almost all teachers experience unexpected classroom problems. To some degree, all need supervisory help. This is especially true of first-year teachers.

Thus, the most important traits to be evaluated in the non-tenured teacher

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are: (1) his willingness to accept help and (2) his improvement as demonstrated by growth in skill, in specified areas, from evaluation to evaluation.

The school administration's ability to detect deficiencies in non-tenured teachers is crucial to the quality of a district's instructional force. In a school district with efficient administration, poor prospects are identified early.

Every school district should have a special development program to give prompt help to beginning teachers with classroom difficulties. It does little good for a supervisor to visit the teacher's classroom and list 10 difficulties that need correction without suggesting real remedies. It is insufficient to demand of the teacher: *you* do something about this. Unless the evaluator *helps* the teacher, he is not doing the required job.

Where correctable, the poor prospect's deficiencies should be immediately treated. To help this beginner develop as a teacher, the district's staff of helping teachers should work quickly to: (1) overcome his teaching difficulties and (2) fortify his teaching strengths.

The helping teacher should begin with the most serious difficulty and work with the teacher until he has eliminated it. The helping teacher should then work on a second difficulty and so on until he has helped the new teacher to overcome all his deficiencies.

If supervisory first aid fails, the effort at least should guarantee that the beginning teacher's pupils receive necessary instruction during the crisis period.

Where the beginner's deficiencies are so widespread or so deep as to be uncorrectable, the administration must see that this individual is replaced by a competent practitioner at the earliest moment.

CAREER-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Behavioral psychology tells us that people respond better to challenge than to threat, better to praise than to criticism. The surest way to increase the effectiveness of any professional is to surround him with productive peers, expose him to new ideas, and stimulate him into constructive analysis of his own performance.

Many professionals in all fields operate capably in their jobs at less than their maximal level of production or efficiency. Accordingly, industry spends considerable amounts to upgrade the performance of professional, technical, and middle-management personnel. Schools make little comparable effort to upgrade the efficiency of their professional personnel—the teachers.

Yet, in this technological age, when schools are attempting to handle the changing expectations of a new generation of youth, teachers may need constant career development—not necessarily college courses, but also training in such areas as group dynamics, human relations, and skill development. One month of paid leave to work with an outside social or educational agency might be more important to a teacher's career in his third year, for example, than a full-paid sabbatical leave in his seventh.

As a minimum, every teacher is entitled to expect that he can receive advice, constructive comment, and confidential help from a competent school official, promptly, upon request. But true staff development requires far more than this minimum.

Career development requires helping teachers who serve as counselors to members of the teaching staff. To be effective, this development operation should be completely separated from job-oriented evaluation. Relations between teachers and counselors should be so confidential as to be almost confessorial.

A counselor of teachers must be a sensitizer and human referral library for professional improvement. He must be able to suggest teaching techniques that will immediately help the teacher; relevant books and articles to be read; seminars and conferences to be attended; human relations and group-dynamics techniques to be used; master teachers in other schools to be observed.

One danger inherent in today's standard evaluation is that "good" ratings can leave a teacher so satisfied that he stops experimenting to find ways of improving. Career development should not lock in the teacher exclusively on his existing methodology. It should encourage him to try new ways, new things, new ideas.

An observation is useful to the extent that it stimulates a teacher to branch out; encourages him to experiment with new ideas and techniques; and prepares him to changes in the student body, the educational process, or the course content.

Professional improvement of teachers should emphasize strengths more than weaknesses. The teacher who communicates easily with his pupils verbally but has poor handwriting should be urged to find alternatives to chalkboard work, not given "bad marks" for illegibility. The more that teacher's strengths are developed, the less important the weakness becomes.

Without a staff of helping teachers—working with both tenured and non-tenured teachers—evaluation of teacher performance will remain of limited value in the career development of the instructional staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. "Evaluation" as it now exists in many school districts is generally unproductive for career development. Because it often threatens rather than helps the teacher, job-oriented evaluation as often presently conducted discourages teachers from seeking assistance. It is too often an obstacle to professional improvement rather than an incentive.

Recommendation—The local teacher association should negotiate with the school board to establish mutually agreeable procedures for the evaluation of teachers and other members of the school staff. Where such procedures are already part of a written board-association contract, these provisions should be reviewed and improved when necessary.

As a minimum, every district should maintain trained specialists to provide (1) for the non-tenure teacher—objective job-oriented evaluation and, (2) for all teachers — opportunities for career development.

In the absence of specific provisions for both procedures and program in the board-association agreement, the Association should negotiate the existence of a joint board-association committee to study improvements in staff evaluation.

2. Poor evaluation practice dampens teacher morale. It decreases teacher effectiveness rather than increasing it. Teachers must have a check against poorly done evaluations.

Recommendation—The local teacher association should make certain that its written comprehensive agreement with the school board allows any teacher to institute a grievance if the teacher objects to a written evaluation of his performance. In addition, some standing committee of the association, such as the Committee on Professional Rights and Responsibilities, should periodically review the work of the district's evaluators.

3. Because the school administration is the key to evaluation, evaluators should be selected with care and themselves evaluated regularly. Selection, evaluation, tenure, and dismissal of the school staff—and especially evaluators—is a joint responsibility of the school administration and the local teacher association.

Recommendation—Every school district should establish a committee including representatives of the school administration and the teacher's association to recommend: (1) which candidates should or should not be named to positions carrying the responsibility of hiring, firing, promoting, demoting, or evaluating professional school personnel; (2) which of these administrators should or should not be reappointed to their positions; and (3) which of these administrators should or should not receive tenure in their positions. In districts which do not establish such a committee, the local teacher association should assign the responsibility of making such recommendations to one of its standing committees, such as its Committee on Teacher Education and Professional Standards.

4. Dismissal procedures must guarantee due process to the affected teacher. On the surface, due process sometimes seems a way to protect the incompetent, to prevent the employer from discharging a staff member unworthy of gaining tenure. This, however, is not so. Fair dismissal procedures merely require the school administration to follow contractual obligations and to prove its case. With an incompetent, this is not difficult to do.

Recommendation—Every local teacher association should negotiate the adoption of fair dismissal procedures for teachers in the district. For the non-tenure teacher these procedures should include:

1. Warnings when performance falls below expected standards—and help to improve.
2. Notification of non-tenured teachers by April 30 of their employment status for the following school year.
3. Reasons, in writing, for dismissal, if the teacher requests same.
4. A hearing before the board of education on those reasons, if the teacher requests it.
5. Binding arbitration, in the event of adverse board decision, if the teacher requests it.

CONCLUSION

Evaluation is a fact of school life. As things stand, teachers usually view it with suspicion. If sufficiently improved, evaluation could become recognized as a benefit to all involved parties:

To the Administrator—by providing a fair basis for recommending dismissal, retention, reassignment, promotion, or withholding of an increment.

To the Non-Tenure Teacher—by providing (1) career development, (2) help in overcoming deficiencies, or (3) explanations for dismissal.

To the Tenure Teacher—by providing (1) career development and (2) documented evidence to be used for defense in the event proceedings are instituted to withhold increment or force dismissal under the Tenure Hearing Act.